

## **Burlington County Times**

### **Editorial/Gun Folly**

#### **An ill-conceived bill in Senate give industry broad immunity from lawsuits**

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The bill's formal name is the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act.

Bryan Miller has another name for it. He calls Senate Bill S.397 the "Gun Industry Impunity Act." The executive director of Ceasefire NJ, the statewide coalition devoted to decreasing gun violence, Miller charges the measure will make it more difficult for federal officials to enforce existing gun laws.

He insists it will let gun dealers operate with few restraints, and it will eventually allow more people to put their hands on guns, including both foreign and home-grown terrorists.

We prefer to think he's wrong. We fear he's dead-on right.

As early as today but more likely tomorrow, the U.S. Senate will vote on a bill designed to prohibit civil liability suits from being brought in any state or federal court against a manufacturer or seller of guns and ammunition.

In essence, the move grants broad immunity to manufacturers, distributors, dealers and importers of guns - a coveted status no other industry enjoys.

Idaho Republican Sen. Larry E. Craig is the sponsor of the bill. He's also a board member of the National Rifle Association.

If you haven't heard much about this measure, Miller isn't surprised. It's something of a stealth item, having made it to the full Senate with no public hearings and no stops along the way in committee.

In fact, The Washington Post reported yesterday the NRA convinced Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist to abandon debate on the Defense Department Appropriations Bill to allow his colleagues to move ahead post haste with this bailout of the gun industry.

There are a million reasons why this bill is folly, at least one for each handgun that reaches the wrong hands.

Last September, the families of the D.C. sniper entered into a \$2.5 million settlement with Bull's Eye Shooters Supply and Bushmaster Firearms, manufacturer of the assault rifle used by John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo.

As important as the financial settlement was the fact that as a result of the lawsuit, Bushmaster agreed to overhaul some of its policies to better protect the public.

Under S.397, that lawsuit - and others like it - would never have gotten off the ground. And that's the major defect in this unwelcome piece of legislation.

Equally dismaying: The bill ties the hands of residents from New Jersey as well as the 49 other states, and it limits the powers of state attorneys general and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau to hold the reins on an industry already responsible for too much bloodshed.

No wonder the law-enforcement community has come out against the act.

To their credit, New Jersey's Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg have led the fight in Washington to derail the move. For that, the state's residents should be proud.

Sadly, the votes are most likely there to assure the bill's passage this week.

The gun lobby holds powerful sway over Washington, and the Republican-controlled Senate seems poised to do its dirty work.